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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001924

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [SP](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: CHIRAC'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR ON SYRIA/LEBANON, IRAN AND IRAQ

REF: A. STATE 44251

[B](#). PARIS 1588

Classified By: DCM Karl Hofmann for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

Summary

[1](#). (C) Amb Stapleton took the occasion of a meeting March 23 with President Chirac's Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne (MGM) on another subject (septel), to discuss Middle East issues, focusing on Syria/Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq. Concerning Syria/Lebanon, MGM said the GOF continues to believe UNSYG Special Envoy Roed-Larsen should go to Damascus, enabling him to declare that specific demands had been made directly of President Asad. The right package of threats and incentives needed to be agreed on, said MGM, and he looked forward to further discussion during the Secretary's upcoming visit to Paris and his own visit to

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Washington the first week of April. He reported just-received news that Spanish FM Moratinos plans to engage further with the SARG. MGM stated that Chirac will ask Zapatero to turn this off. More generally, MGM observed that while it has been able to hold on, the Syrian regime is uneasy. Europeans need to be reminded of Syria's close ties to Iran. Arab governments, beginning with the Saudis, are fearful of what might come "after Bashar"; this weighs on their perceptions and policies. MGM had been struck, during Chirac's recent visit to Saudi Arabia (ref B), by how troubled King Abdullah is by what he regards as the destabilizing results of elections across North Africa and the Middle East.

[2](#). (C) On Iran, MGM said he was pleased by the degree of agreement between the U.S. and France on how to proceed in New York -- beginning with a PRST as the vehicle for expressing Council unity. To reach unanimity in the Council, however, some further flexibility may be necessary. MGM said he had offered for consideration to Chirac two changes in the draft PRST: dropping references to the specifics of the IAEA resolution, and leaving out for now a Chapter VII invocation.

On Iraq, MGM said that greater Arab support for the political process was essential, and cited Saudi concern about Iranian involvement and its implications, particularly for the stability of its Northeast Province. End Summary.

Syria/Lebanon

[3](#). (C) MGM noted the fluidity of the moment, and looked forward to a briefing by UNSYG Special Envoy Roed-Larsen following his trip to the region. Noting Syrian FM Muallem's visit to Moscow, and the news just in that VP Shara will be visiting Riyadh on March 23, MGM said France will "need to scrutinize" any Saudi or Egyptian initiative, referring to the possibility that the Saudis might, at the Arab Summit (and at prior French behest--ref B), encourage Lahoud to leave office; the Egyptians would then follow up with an effort of their own. On the whole, observed MGM, the Arabs remain reluctant to involve themselves. MGM noted a difference of view with Washington over the advisability of Larsen going to Damascus, and what "basket of threats and incentives" he should carry with him. The French would like to see him go before April 26. MGM reiterated France's view that it was important that Larsen, as the international community's single legitimate interlocutor, be able to say publicly that he had made specific demands directly to Bashar al-Asad. Referring to recent conversations with Washington, MGM said he looked forward to discussing the matter with Secretary Rice next week. He could also be address it when

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he next visits Washington the first week of April.

[4](#). (C) MGM cited opposition to European contact with the SARG, recalling the French protest to Madrid over FM Moratinos' trip to Damascus. He added that the GOF had just learned of Moratinos' intention (not further specified) to further engage Syria. Chirac would speak directly to President Zapatero to dissuade him from any further Spanish efforts -- and from "breaking ranks" with the rest of Europe. MGM also noted that France remained vigilant in the EU in order to ensure that the association agreement with Syria remains frozen. Responding to DCM Hofmann's reminder of the succession of EIB loans granted to Syria, MGM noted that

France could not oppose those loans that were largely for humanitarian and developmental purposes; the latest loan, for water purification, fell in that category. MGM conceded that the previous EIB telecom loan was unfortunate. With regard to bilateral sanctions, France still does not have, absent UN action, the legal basis for undertaking them.

15. (C) Concerning Syria more generally, MGM posited the need for careful handling so as not to create the impression of the West ganging up on the Arabs or on Muslims more generally. Citing perceived impatience in Washington over Syria, MGM commented that Syria's position has in fact not improved. Opponents to the regime are now expressing themselves, and the regime is clearly fearful for the future. A potentially powerful point for the U.S. and France to highlight with European governments is Syria's position as Iran's ally -- given deep concern in Europe over the radicalization of Iran's regime and policies. Arab governments, on the other hand, are preoccupied by the question of what happens if Asad goes. Chirac's recent visit to Saudi Arabia (ref B) had made clear to him that King Abdullah, while concerned about Syria, is troubled by developments throughout the region -- in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and the Palestinian territories. They are seen as being the direct result of elections and other democratizing moves. With regard to the way ahead, UNSCRs 1559 and 1595 provide the vehicles for a common approach for keeping pressure on Syria. MGM stated that the reaction in Lebanon to Brammertz's quiet, focused approach is positive; the Lebanese see him as a bulldog who has gotten hold of the case and won't let go. He also commented that the Saudis are now, for the first time, displaying an interest in an international tribunal. Due to their increasing nervousness over the stability of regimes, they see an international tribunal as possibly providing a deterrent effect against those who might be tempted to overturn them by assassination. Responding to the Ambassador, MGM said he understood -- and shared -- our continuing concerns about terrorist infiltration into Iraq from Syria.

Iran

16. (C) Regarding Iran, MGM cited as a noteworthy development the first internal expression of opposition to Iran's nuclear policies -- by former President Khatami's brother. MGM said he had concluded, based on his conversation with NSA Hadley, that France and the U.S. were in synch on the way ahead in New York. A clear, unanimous message to Tehran from the international community is what is needed. A PRST provides the vehicle. If unanimity in the Council is not achievable, a UNSCR offers a fall-back. A resolution would be far less desirable, however. Tehran would view it as the product of a divided Council, and conclude its approach had been vindicated. The question now is what price would we be willing to pay for Council unanimity. MGM said he had discussed this on March 22 with Chirac, with FM Douste-Blazy present, and had offered two ideas. First, while the PRST would contain explicit reference to the BOG decision, the specific requirements it sets out for Iran need not be repeated. Second, he had proposed holding off invocation of Chapter VII at this stage, but perhaps including a formulation making clear our resolve. The referral from the IAEA to the UNSC already represents a politically significant change, he had argued, and the PRST registered the concern of the international community. It need not, however, anticipate future UNSC action. The PRST, unlike a UNSCR, is not after all a vehicle for action; it therefore need not refer to Chapter VII. MGM noted that the Chinese, interestingly, were not posing problems in New York. Chinese positions were having the effect of forcing the Russians to be more reasonable. MGM closed this segment by stressing the importance of the U.S. and France staying in lock step.

Iraq

17. (C) Responding to Ambassador Stapleton's query about current French perspectives on Iraq, MGM said that the GOF had attentively followed the President's latest public statements on Iraq. While France was extremely concerned about the situation, it would not -- given the sensitivity -- make any public statements. What is essential is greater Arab support of a political process that peacefully sorts out Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'a equities, and produces a government. Again drawing on impressions drawn from Chirac's visit to Saudi Arabia, referring to Chirac's meeting with King Abdullah and his own with Prince Bandar, MGM said he had been struck by the degree of Saudi preoccupation with Iranian involvement in Iraq. The Saudis had cited Pasdaran "flooding across the border" into Iraq, and were clearly fixated on implications for Saudi stability, particularly with regard to the Shi'a of the Northeast Province. France favors any realistic Arab initiatives, including the Arab League's idea of Iraq's neighbors assisting in the peaceful consolidation of a united Iraq. MGM also noted that regional fears of Iranian involvement in Iraq, and Iran's perceived ability to

cause mischief in the region, actually dampen any Arab interest in criticizing Iran on the nuclear issue. MGM offered a general caution with regard to dealing with Iran. For our longer term interests, we must find a way not to offend Iranian dignity, and avoid actions that have the effect of radicalizing further the Muslim world, and the Shi'a in particular. The latter point had been made to him by Prime Minister Singh's diplomatic advisor, who pointed out that India is home not only to the world's second largest Muslim community, but also to the second largest number (22 million) of Shi'a.

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Stapleton